

Weeds in the Garden

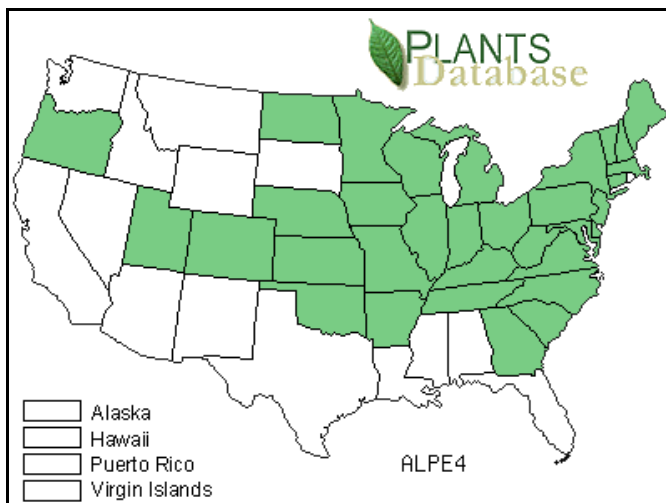
Garlic Mustard

Common Name: Garlic mustard

Scientific Name: *Alliaria petiolata*

Characteristics: Garlic mustard is a cool season biennial herb. It has alternate leaves, which are toothed and somewhat heart shaped. The leaves have a long stalk. It grows 12-48 inches in height. Its stems and its leaves emit a sharp onion or garlic odor when crushed. First year plants appear as a small rosette of three to four round leaves about two to four inches off the ground. In the Great Lakes Region, second-year plants bloom in May. The flowers are white and have four-petals. The plant has a long s-shaped taproot.

Current Range: Garlic mustard is widely distributed throughout the Northeast and Midwest of U.S., from Canada to South Carolina, and occasional sites in western states.



Origin: Garlic mustard was introduced by European settlers for use in cooking and supposed medicinal use. It is a member of the mustard family.

“Look Alikes”: Garlic mustard can resemble other native mustards. The best distinguishing characteristic is the garlic smell when crushed. In addition, most members of the mustard family have divided leaves rather than toothed or lobed leaves.

Habitat: Garlic mustard grows in upland and floodplain forests, yards and along roadsides. Generally it prefers some shade and cannot tolerate acidic soils.

The Problem: Garlic mustard is rapidly spreading through woodlands. Once it invades a wooded area, it rapidly dominates the forest floor and can cause the loss of native species within ten years. Unlike many invasive plants, it readily spreads into high quality forests. Its numerous seeds are dispersed in the fur of animals or by flowing water or human activities. Hundreds of seeds are produced per plant. Seeds can remain viable for up to seven years.

Solutions:

Prevention – Education and citizen awareness can play a huge role in controlling this exotic species. Gardeners and landscapers can slow its spread by eliminating its use in yards and gardens. Plants already in cultivation can be removed and destroyed.

Mechanical – For minor infestations, hand pulling can eliminate plants. However this may also disturb the soil and other native species in the area. If hand pulling, care must be taken that the upper half of the root is removed. If you want to deplete the seed bank, leave the soil disturbed to encourage higher germination and continue to pull seedling plants as they sprout.

Cutting garlic mustard flowers can be less destructive to nearby native plants than pulling but flower stalks must be cut before seed production. After initial cutting, repeat the method for several consecutive years. If the plants are found after seeds have matured, remove plants and seed heads from the area. Fall or early spring burning may be effective for large infestations. Burning kills first year plants if the fire is hot enough to remove all leaf litter. Three to five years of burning are required as seeds may continue to germinate for several years.

Chemical – Severe infestations can be controlled with Glyphosphate. It should be applied early in year before wildflowers have appeared or in late fall when native plants have gone dormant. Prior to use of chemical herbicides, it is important to consult with local natural resource staff to determine which herbicides would be the most effective and would have the least impact on native species. It is also essential to follow safety instructions on the selected product.

**For more information please contact the
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